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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted during the 1980 presidential campaign to answer three questions about the nature of public opinion: (1) What is the effect of customary patterns of mass media use and interpersonal communication on perceptions of public opinion about election campaigns? (2) What effect does the magnitude of discrepancy between a person's own vote choice and his/her perception of public opinion have on the use of mass media and interpersonal communication during the campaign? and (3) What is the relationship between own preference and perceived public opinion discrepancy, campaign communication behavior, and changes in vote preferences during the campaign? Telephone interviews were conducted with 98 eligible voters in Dane County, Wisconsin, three times--twice prior and once after the election. Results indicated perplexing and sometimes ambiguous answers to the questions. Television influence appeared stronger than either newspaper or interpersonal communication influence. In answer to the second question, the "spiral of silence" theory, that those who see their position losing ground will stop talking with others, was given little support. Data on the third question indicate connections between perception of public opinion and personal vote preferences, but the complexity of the issue does not permit a strong assertion of causation. (JL)

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PUBLIC OPINION DU JOUR: ITS IMPACT ON COMMUNICATION AND VOTING BEHAVIOR

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PUBLIC OPINION DU JOUR: ITS IMPACT ON COMMUNICATION AND VOTING BEHAVIOR

"Public opinion", as a concept and as a process, has been considered a key factor in the outcome of political issues for centuries. Although the term was not used until the eighteenth century, the phenomenon of public opinion has been described in ancient, medieval, and early modern times (Davison, 1957). "All governments rest on opinion" became the doctrine of the American Founding Fathers (Vollrath, 1976).

Each proponent and expounder of public opinion tends to have different ideas regarding the origination and process of that opinion. John Locke referred to public opinion as "the third kind of law"; David Hume mentioned the peculiar conformity pressure of public opinion which "is called forth by the human urge to be respected"; James Madison wrote that the strength and influence of each individual's opinion depends on the number of people who are supposed to have entertained the same opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1979).

Tonnies (1922) reference to a "liquid and solid" state of opinions and attitudes attempted to separate out a more established opinion (e.g. a norm) from an opinion in flux or disputed, a premise which is in line with Allport's (1937) statement that public opinion is ordinarily a transitory phenomenon.

It is this transitory nature of public opinion that requires investigation beyond the simple descriptions and conceptualizations that have typified prior public opinion research. Rather, attempts should be made to link these characteristics together into a satisfactory theoretical framework.

Few researchers have dwelt on changes and trends in public opinion or on interrelating various observed aspects of the concept. It is in this context that Noelle-Neumann's unique research on the "spiral of silence" is important. Allport (1937) implied that public opinion forms through an individual's observation of his or her social environment and more recently Noelle-Neumann (cf 1974), 1977, 1979) attempted to analyze this process in her research. She states that if public opinion does indeed arise from such an interaction with the social

environment, processes similar to those found by Asch (1953) and Milgram (1961) would be confirmed. That is, she believes that to the individual, "not isolating himself is more important than his own judgment."

Noelle-Neumann defines public opinion as "the dominating opinion which compels compliance of attitude and behavior in that it threatens the dissenting individual with isolation." She assumes that fear of isolating oneself (fear of separation or doubt about one's capacity for judgment) is an integral part of all processes of public opinion. Individuals estimate when they would isolate themselves or fall out of social favor by 1) observing their social environment, 2) assessing the distribution of opinions for or against their ideas, and 3) evaluating the strength, the urgency and chances of success of certain proposals and viewpoints. These behaviors are important in changeable circumstances where people are caught in a struggle between conflicting positions and have to consider where they stand. An election campaign is a case in point.

Noelle-Neumann postulates that as individuals scan their environment, they form a picture of the distribution of opinion in their social environment and of the trend of opinion. Willingness to expose their views publicly will vary according to individual assessment of this distribution. Individuals who notice their own personal opinion is spreading will voice this opinion self-confidently in public; those who notice their opinions are "losing ground" will be inclined to adopt a more reserved attitude and remain silent.

In a previous study, Glynn and McLeod (in press) investigated the "spiral of silence" as a potential influence on the outcome of the 1976 presidential election. In addition to the perceptions individuals had of others' opinions, proposed and actual voting behaviors outcropping from these perceived opinions were analyzed. Glynn and McLeod included behaviors in their analysis since it is commonly believed that once expectations about the opinions and behavior of others on a given issue have been formed, these expectations tend to "influence the opinions and behavior of the people who entertain them," (Davison, 1957).

Support was found for the hypothesis that perceptions of public opinion--judgments about what others believe--would affect public behavior. Perceptions of the proportion of the vote each candidate would get and of the perceived gain or loss in public support for the preferred candidate added significant increments to the prediction of vote preferences in September and in October before the 1976 election.

In addition, Glynn and McLeod looked at a briefly mentioned distinction in the Noelle-Neumann research between the "hardcore" opinion holders and the rest of society. Noelle-Neumann (1973) stated that the hardcore are "not prepared to conform, to change their opinions, or even to be silent in the face of public opinion."

This distinction provided some marked contrasts. Climate of opinion predicted to vote much more for the Nonhardcore then for the Hardcore group. Impressive differences also were found in the extent to which interpersonal discussion was involved in making judgments about support for the two candidates, averaging 22% for the hardcore compared with only 3% for the nonhardcore.

The one hypothesis posited by Noelle-Neumann that was not supported by the 1976 election data concerned the actual "spiral of silence" -- that those individuals who saw their candidate as losing would discuss less during the campaign. Actually the opposite effect was found. Those individuals in <u>both</u> the Nonhardcore and Hardcore groups who saw their candidate as losing were somewhat more likely to engage in interpersonal discussion.

Important questions remained unanswered and new questions were brought to light as a result of the 1976 investigation. For the present paper, data collected during the 1980 election campaign are analyzed not only to replicate initial findings, but to investigate other aspects of the spiral of silence and the climate of public opinion. Media use as a predictor of perceived opinion and as a device for resolving discrepancies between own opinion and others'

opinions are analyzed in addition to identifying how these factors affect actual vote behavior. More specifically, three research questions are examined:

First, what is effect of customary patterns of mass media use and interpersonal communication on perceptions of public opinion about election campaigns?

Second, what effect does the magnitude of discrepancy between a person's own vote choice and his/her perception of public opinion have on the use of mass media and interpersonal communication during the campaign?

Finally, what is the relationship between own preference and perceived public opinion discrepancy, campaign communication behavior, and changes in vote preferences during the campaign?

Study Design

Telephone interviews were conducted with a panel of 98 eligible voters in Dane county, Wisconsin at three time points -- two prior to and one after the 1980 Presidential election. The first interview was taken prior to the initial September debate, the second in late October and the third in the week after the November election. The second and third waves also included a replenishment sample of 367 additional respondents not previously interviewed. Random digit dialing procedures were used with proportionate probability sampling stratified according to the number of private lines at each exchange. Respondents were screened at each selected number to ensure their eligibility to vote.

The response rate was more than 70 percent, with three call backs. Interviewing was conducted by trained graduate students and advanced undergraduates. All interviews were authenticated by the November interview wave.

Dane county contains the city of Madison with the state capital and the university. Obviously, it should not be considered as typical of the rest of the country. About 40% of its citizens have graduated from college and the area has a strong progressive and liberal tradition. Anderson should have done

well there and, relatively speaking, he did in getting 12% of the county vote in November. Carter lead Reagan in the county 53% to 35%. Our total sample came within 2% of the actual county vote for each of the three candidates.

Customary patterns of mass media and interpersonal communication behavior and two relatively stable political orientations served as exogenous variables. Television National News was indexed by two questions: "About how often do you watch ...national news broadcasts? Would you say frequently, sometimes, rarely or never?" and "When you are watching television news programs and stories about ...national government and politics appear, how much attention do you pay to them? Would you say you pay close attention, some attention or little attention?" Responses to the two questions were added to form an index. Newspaper National News was formed by adding responses to two similar questions: "How often do you read ...stories about national government and politics?" and "When you are reading the newspaper and come across stories about ...national government and politics, how much attention do you pay to them?" Responses categories were the same as for the two television questions.

Another type of customary communication behavior, indexing Television Reliance, Newspaper Reliance and Interpersonal Reliance, was measured by rankings given to the question: "We're interested in which source you use most for political information. Would you say you use newspapers, friends and family, television, magazines, or some other source most for current events and political information?" After choosing which they used most, the respondents then ranked the other sources.

Two relatively stable political variables, Party Identification and Political Interest, served primarily as control variables. Strong identification with the Democratic party was assigned a "1", Moderate Democrats a "2", Independent Democrats a "3", Independents a "4" etc. In order to tap Political Interest people were asked: "Generally, would you say you are very interested in politics,

interested in politics, somewhat interested in politics, or not at all interested in politics?"

Two types of perceptions of public opinion were used to form critical independent variables for the study. In both the September and October interview waves, respondents were asked to estimate what percent of the November vote each of three major candidates would receive at the time of the interview (Perceived Opinion measured in September only) and in the election in November (Perceived Outcome or Percent Carter, Percent Reagan and Percent Anderson). They were also asked whether each candidate was gaining support, staying the same or losing support (Support:Carter, Support:Reagan and Support:Anderson) in both the September and October waves.

By taking each respondent's presidential choice (Carter, Reagan or Anderson) and comparing it to that person's judgment as to whether their preferred candidate was gaining, staying the same or losing, an index of Support Discrepancy was constructed. High discrepancy (3) was assigned cases where the preferred candidate was seen as losing support, a (2) was given where that candidate was judged as staying the same, and low discrepancy (1) was attributed where the chosen candidate was preceived as gaining.

Another aspect of Noelle-Neumann's work was indexed by Hardcoreness, the degree of vote preference consistency through three waves of interviewing for the small panel respondents. Those who unequivocally preferred a given candidate in both September and October and who reported voting for that same candidate in November were classified as "Hardcore." Those who were leaning toward a candidate in September and/or October and who voted for that candidate in November were called "Leaners." Those showing greater change, switching candidates between rounds for example, were labeled "Nonhardcore."

This method of identifying the Hardcore group by their campaign behavior is only one among many possible ways of measuring the concept. Noelle-Neumann has not been very specific about the conceptionalization of Hardcore other than

to note their presence and their behavior as being contrary to that of most of the public. Because she clearly applies the spiral of silence to elections (Noelle-Neumann, 1977), it seems reasonable to develop the measurement of Hard-core behavior appropriate to the political campaign. Alternatively, self-report procedures might have been used in which the respondent rates the firmness of own attitudes or the tendency to speak out on unpopular topics. This approach might provide more generality across varied situations but it suffers from a potentially high degree of social desirability. Multiple measures using differing methods may be the best strategy to follow in future research. Previous findings (Glynn and McLeod, in press) do seem to provide some construct validity to the present way of measuring Hardcoreness.

A third set of campaign variables was comprised of communication behavior reported during the campaign. This was available for the September and October interview waves. Campaign Attention: Television was measured by the question: "When you are watching television news programs and stories about the current presidential campaign appear, would you say you pay close attention, some attention or little attention to them?" Campaign Attention: Newspapers was measured by: "How much have you been discussing the election for president with your family or friends? Would you say a lot, a little, or not at all."

In order to test Noelle-Neumann's major assumption of the "spiral of silence," a special set of questions was devised to focus on discussion situations that would be composed of other people potentially congruent or noncongruent with the respondent's vote preference. We asked: "If you were at a social gathering with people you know, and they were discussing the presidential campaign, how likely would you be to enter into the conversation if they were Reagan supporters? Would it be very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely that you would join the conversation?" The question was then repeated for the situation where the social gathering consisted of Carter supporters. Time limitations prevented us from repeating the question for a gathering of

Anderson supporters. Anderson backers were thus excluded from the analysis because a congruent situation could not be analyzed for them. For respondents supporting either Reagan or Carter in October, we used the Reagan and Carter social gathering questions as either "congruent" or "noncongruent" according to the voter preference of the respondent. For supporters of the two leading candidates, a comparison then could be made between the likelihood of their entering into the partisan discussion at the two types of parties.

Dependent variables involving effects on voting were ascertained by three different types of questions. First, in the October interviews, respondents were asked: "How much would you say that your feelings have changed about any of the presidential candidates as a result of discussion with your family and friends, a lot, a little or not at all?" A second measure was obtained in the November post-election wave by asking respondents the extent to which the candidates' chances of winning had influenced their voting decision. A three-point scale was used: a lot, a little or not at all. Respondents were similarly queried about three other potential sources of influence: the political party of the candidates, their stands on issues and their personal qualities.

Vote Preference, the final voting effect criterion, was indexed for each candidate on a five point scale: sure of vote for the given candidate (5), leaning toward the candidate (4); undecided (3); leaning toward another candidate (2); and sure of vote for another candidate (1). In the post-election survey, voting was measured as having either voted or not voted for a given candidate.

Hierarchical least-squares regression was the basic analytical method used. The control variable, political interest or party affiliation, was introduced as the first predictor block. The main effect of either the communication or climate of opinion variables, (the three Reliance measures, Support Discrepancy or the Estimate Percentage and Support) were then added as a second block. The

third block was the Hardcoreness measure as a main effect. Finally, a fourth block of interactions of Hardcoreness with the second block variables was introduced. Significance tests (F values) were used for individual Betas and block or predictor variables.

Results

The association among the climate of opinion variables provides support for the operationalization of the "climate of opinion." Most of the correlations were fairly strong (.30 and above) and the direction of relationships was also quite consistent with expectations. That is, Carter variables were negatively associated with Reagan variables etc. (Data not shown in tables).

The Hardcore and Leaner groups tended to split between Democratic and Republican party affiliation, while more than half of the Nonhardcore (61%) were Democrats. Of those Nonhardcore who expressed a preference in September however, most picked Anderson. In October, this preference declined dramatically with Carter taking the lead. Carter maintained this lead in the final November vote with 53% from the Nonhardcore group compared to only 11% for Anderson.

The Leaner group split between Carter and Reagan in both September and October with Reagan taking the lead in the November vote with 47% compared to 38% for Carter and 15% for Anderson. The Hardcore, however, were split among the three candidates and, by definition, maintained this split over the three time points (36% for Reagan and Carter, 27% for Anderson).

Of greater interest here is the potential for seeing "public opinion" as independent from one's own opinion. That is, perhaps there is more to public opinion than merely an aggregation of individual opinions. Table 1 provides support for this possibility. In September, for example, while the aggregate of individual responses gave Carter a clear lead over Reagan (41% vs. 32%) with Anderson a close third (27%), respondents perceived the current climate of opinion (perceived opinion) as being close between Carter (42%) and Reagan

(40%) and placed Anderson as a more distant third (18%). All three estimates were within three percent of the most recent September Gallup poll prior to the first interview wave, considerably closer than to the aggregate of the respondents' own preferences. The differences from the Gallup poll are primarily in the direction of the respondents' preferences, or perhaps as better described, in the direction of the "climate of opinion" for Dane county voters.

The relative independence of public opinion judgments from own preferences is seen in the results for the respondents' "perceived outcome" of the November vote (perceptions of what proportions each candidate would receive) (Table 1). Respondents' judgments of the outcome differed from the aggregate of their own preferences by an average of 11% in September and of 5% in October. At both time points, the perceived outcome for Anderson was much less than the aggregation of own preferences (11% vs. 27%, 10% vs. 16%) while the perceptions for Reagan were higher than the aggregated preferences of the panel (43% vs. 32%, 45% vs. 36%). Overall, the perceived outcome of the election was in the direction of accuracy with respect to the actual November vote, differing by an average of 5% in the September wave and by only 4% in the October interviewing.

As shown in Table 2, the means for Perceived Outcome tended to differ among the three groups. While the Hardcore and Nonhardcore groups gave Carter a slight edge in September and October, the Leaners split between Carter and Reagan in September; in October they tended to see Reagan in the lead. All three groups saw a definite drop from September to October in the percent of the vote Anderson would carry. In September, the Leaner group was the closest to the current poll data (from Table 1). Their estimates deviated less than 1% from the September poll, while in October the Hardcore group estimates were identical to the October Gallup poll. In terms of predicting the final outcome, the Nonhardcore were the least accurate at both time points although they, like the other two groups, came closer in October than in September.

It is clear that a decline in Anderson support from September to October was picked up by a majority in all three groups (Table 2). While the Leaner and Hardcore groups tended to see Reagan as staying the same, a large proportion of the Nonhardcore group (60%) saw Reagan as losing support in September. By October, however more than half (52%) of the Nonhardcore group saw Reagan as gaining support. They also tended to see Carter as gaining in October (57%), although this may be due to the fact that more than half of this group had a Democratic party affiliation.

COMMUNICATION INFLUENCES ON PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION

The first major research question concerned the effects of customary patterns of mass media use and interpersonal communication on perceptions of public opinion about the election campaign. The estimates of candidates' vote percentages were regressed on television, newspaper and interpersonal reliance to examine this question (Table 3). Level of political interest was used as a prior control variable and Hardcoreness was introduced as a main effect and as an interactive term with the three types of reliance.

Political interest played a significant role in the September comparisons with the more interested respondents tending to see a close race between Carter and Reagan while the less involved gave the edge to Carter. By October, most respondents regardless of their political interest had begun to see an extremely close race between Carter and Reagan. The more interested did show an accurate if nonsignificant tendency to estimate a lower percentage outcome for Anderson than did the less interested. In analyses not shown in our tables, Party Affiliation was used as a control variable, but it accounted for very little variance in the Perceived Outcome variables.

The three communication reliance measures did exert substantial influence, jointly accounting for an average of almost 11% of the variance in the three candidates' vote estimate in the two waves of interviews (Table 3). The more

reliant on television news the respondents were, the lower estimates they gave of Anderson's vote outcome in the September interviewing. This pattern replicated in October, but not to a significant degree.

Newspaper reliance as a main effect accounted for little Perceived Outcome variance at either time point, but the interaction of newspaper reliance with Hardcoreness accounted for almost 12% of the variance in the Reagan climate of opinion variable and for 5% of the Carter vote estimates in September. It appears that in September those reliant on newspapers who were low on the Hardcore scale tended to give higher estimates of perceived vote outcome for Carter and lower estimates for Reagan. The Hardcore were not affected by newspaper reliance. In October, it was again the Nonhardcore who differed according to their level of newspaper reliance. This time, however, their higher reliance was associated with a reverse pattern--they gave lower estimates to Carter and higher ones to Reagan than did those less reliant on newspapers.

Reliance on other people for political information bore little relationship to Perceived Outcome at either time point, accounting for an average of less than 2% as a main effect and 1% or less in all its interactions.

PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION AND CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION

The second research question investigated whether there was an effect on mass media use and interpersonal communication during the election campaign due to discrepancies between a person's own vote choice and his/her perception of public opinion. A cursory glance at differences between the three groups on political discussion revealed that Hardcore individuals tended to talk more than did the Leaners at both time points and more than did the Nonhardcore in the October wave (Table 4). Those saying they discussed the election "a lot" increased from September to October for both the Hardcore (+27%) and Leaners (+16%), but only slightly among the Nonhardcore (+4%). The high level of campaign discussion among the Hardcore is consistent with the Noelle-Neumann

formulation and replicates our earlier findings (Glynn and McLeod in press).

In order to extend Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence hypothesis, attention to the mass media was investigated along with interpersonal discussion. The Support Discrepancy scale, as described previously, was created to see just how much the cognitive gap between what an individual wants and what is seen occurring in the real world affects media use and interpersonal communication. It was predicted that the greater the discrepancy between perception of real world events and own desires, the more likely an individual would be to use mass media in order to scan the social environment in relative privacy. Less discrepancy would result in more interpersonal discussion and create a reversal of the spiral of silence, that is, a "spiral of confidence."

Regression analyses of this hypothesis revealed somewhat ambiguous results (Table 5). With respect to attention to television during the campaign, discrepancy accounted for a nonsignificant 2.6% of the variance in September. Contrary to prediction, the more discrepant an individual was, the less he or she tended to use television. In October, however, almost 10% of the variance in attention to the campaign on television was accounted for by support discrepancy. This time the relationship was positive, as predicted. That is, the more discrepant an individual was, the more television was used for campaign election information.

Support Discrepancy did not account for much variance when either newspaper use or interpersonal discussion was used as the dependent variable. The newspaper analyses produced the predicted positive relationship; however, the very small positive coefficients for campaign discussion are opposite to the prediction.

Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence hypothesis was tested more precisely by examining the effects of discrepancy on the likelihood of entering into the discussion with people with similar (congruent) or dissimilar (noncongruent)

viewpoints in hypothetical social situations (Table 6). As expected, respondents were more likely to say they would enter into a congruent political discussion than into an incongruent one (3.76 vs 3.40 for all panel respondents). More important to the spiral of silence formulation are the discussion comparisons broken down by support discrepancy. It was predicted that those seeing their candidate as losing support would be unlikely to enter the discussion (would remain silent) when confronted with others holding opposing views. The mean relevant to this situation in Table 6 is the 3.26 for the noncongruent social gathering among the high discrepant combined Leaner-Nonhardcore group. This mean is somewhat below that shown for all respondents in the noncongruent social situation (3.40) and considerably below that for the congruent gathering (3.76). The difference between the two types of situations is larger for the relevant high discrepant-combined group (+.48) but the comparison with all other groups (+.35) is not statistically significant. In fact, somewhat lower noncongruent discussion means are shown for the High discrepant Hardcore group (3.00) and for the Medium discrepant combined Leaner-Nonhardcore group (3.05). It appears that the strongest inference from Table 6 is that campaign discussion is stimulated by a congruent social gathering where the person has low discrepancy (his/her candidate is winning).

PERCEPTUAL INFLUENCES ON VOTING

Perception of whether respondents believed their feelings had changed as a result of interpersonal campaign discussion is shown in Table 7. The more Hardcore an individual was, the less likely he/she was to perceive a change of feelings as a result of discussion (gamma=-.34). Because the Hardcore reported the most discussion (Table 4) and yet claimed to have changed the least, it is reasonable to infer that the amount of discussion and its effect act with relative independence and that the content and quality of discussion may be the critical variables to examine in understanding interpersonal effects.

Other perceptual variables and their relation to Hardcore, Leaner and Nonhardcore groups are shown in Table 8. There is no significant difference among the groups in the reported effect the political party of a candidate had on their vote--most said this variable had some influence although the Leaners were least likely to say so. Likewise there was little difference among the groups in their perceptions of how much personal qualities of candidates affected their vote, although the Hardcore were somewhat more likely to give higher estimates than other respondents.

There was a stronger difference among the three groups in their perception of the impact of candidates' stands on issues (gamma=+41). The more "Hardcore" individuals were, the more they said issue stands influenced their vote.

As is consistent with Noelle-Neumann's conceptualization of Hardcore, most of them felt that the candidates' chances of winning the election had very little, if any, influence on their vote, while the other two groups were more likely to feel this factor did have some influence (gamma=-.30).

These relationships lead logically into the third and final research question--the influence of perceptions of opinion and "Hardcoreness" on actual voting behavior. Regression analyses were conducted regressing vote preferences in September and October and actual vote in November on party affiliation, the climate of opinion variables, the Hardcore variable and the interaction between the climate and Hardcore variables (Table 9).

As expected, party affiliation accounted for a large and significant amount of the variance at all time points when predicting to Carter vote and Reagan vote, and a lesser amount when predicting to the Anderson vote. The Democrats were more likely to prefer Anderson than were Republicans.

In the case of Carter, estimated percentage of the vote (Perceived Outcome) accounted for a significant amount of the variance at all three time points. That is, the more respondents saw Carter as having a larger percent of the vote, the more they preferred him.

The climate of opinion variables accounted for a significant proportion of the variance when predicting to Reagan vote preference, but only in September (8.5%). These variables did not account for much of the variance when predicting to Anderson vote, except in October (7.6%) when those seeing him as holding even or gaining were more likely to prefer him.

The effect of the interaction of the Hardcore variable with the two climate variables accounted for a significant proportion of variance in only one of the six comparisons in Table 9. In September, Hardcore and perceptions of high percentages and gains in support combined to produce a strong vote preference for Carter. The two interactions accounted for 11.3% of the Carter vote preference variance.

Hardcoreness as a main effect accounted for a significant proportion of variance in only one case. In September, the more Hardcore the voter was, the less likely he/she was to prefer Anderson.

Discussion

It is obvious from the results of this study that the nature and development of the "spiral of silence" is a complex cognitive and societal process. Analysis of the data provides interesting, yet perplexing and ambiguous answers to the three research questions outlined in this paper.

The first major research question dealt with the effect of customary patterns of mass media reliance and interpersonal communication on perceptions of public opinion about election campaigns. While reliance on television was related to seeing John Anderson getting a small proportion of the vote in November, reliance on newspapers and interpersonal sources as main effects accounted for very little of the variance in estimates for any of the three candidates. However, the interaction of newspaper reliance with the Hardcore variable accounted for significant proportions of variance in three of the six comparisons. Perhaps television influences perceptions of opinion regardless of individual attitudes

and beliefs because of its pervasive nature and seeming unbiased presentation. Newspaper use, however, may permit more selectivity in allowing the Hardcore to choose a paper sympathetic to their point of view or to read articles agreeing with their partisan position. Newspaper influence on perceptions of public opinion thus would be limited to those whose positions were undecided and/or to those who were open to influence.

The second research question considered the effects of mass media use and interpersonal communication during the campaign due to discrepancies between a person's own choice of a candidate and his/her own perceptions of what the climate of opinion was to become in November. Discrepancy did not account for much variance except for television news use. A negative relationship was shown between discrepancy and television use in September contrary to prediction; in October the predicted positive relationship was found. The implication may be that individuals with perceived discrepancies between their opinions and their observations of the social environment may delay confronting these discrepancies until the crucial decision-point (i.e., election day) draws near.

The central thesis of Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence, that those who see their position as losing support will stop talking with others, was given little support. Support discrepancy accounted for little variance in the amount of campaign discussion and also failed to produce statistically significant results in the analysis of the willingness to enter into the conversation at hypothetical social gatherings where politics was being discussed. In both cases, the predictions were in the right direction but the relationship was very weak. Perhaps the relatively small sample size did not permit a strong test of the hypothesis or our self-report measures of discussion may have been weak. Differences between West Germany and the United States may be reflected here as well, although good theories should be able to cross national boundaries. Another possibility is that only part of the theory is correct--that people are influenced by their perceptions of the climate of opinion but the social process may not be

simply one of interpersonal communication. Better research designs are needed to evaluate these various possibilities. Following the strategy of Noelle-Neumann, closer attention could be paid to the media content, particularly to their presentation of national and local poll data and coverage of various aspects of candidates' campaigns. It would be useful to know how often the respondents read such stories and what they recall of them. Ideally, multi-stage panel studies of the audience should start much earlier in the campaign (i.e., before the primaries), using time series analyses to capture a more detailed view of the formation of perceptions of public opinion. Sample sizes much larger than used here would clarify many of the ambiguous results we encountered.

Finally, the third research question investigated the influence of perceptions of opinions and "Hardcoreness" on actual voting behavior. The climate of opinion variables were found to influence not only vote preferences for Carter in September and October, but also reports of actual vote for him in November. They also predicted to vote preferences for Reagan in September and for Anderson in October. The interaction of Hardcoreness with the two climate variables also significantly affected vote preferences toward Carter. It is not clear why the largest climate of opinion effects were shown for Carter (averaging 13.1% vs 5.1% for Reagan and 4.6% for Anderson); we rather expected that viability would be a stronger predictor of Anderson support than of the two major candidates. Perhaps for the relatively well informed liberal voters of Dane county it was a matter of estimating whether Carter had a chance because they knew Anderson did not. If Carter had a chance, they would vote for him. If he did not, they would give their protest vote to Anderson. In the later stages of the campaign, they decided Carter was viable and many of our respondents voted for Carter rather than for Anderson, a candidate to whom they attributed the best image among the three contestants and whose issue positions they saw as being closest to their own (McLeod, Glynn and McDonald, 1981).

It does appear that individuals may use their perceptions of current and future states of public opinion as a basis of deciding their vote preferences. As Floyd Allport (1937) said many years ago, "the phenomena to be studied under the term public opinion are essentially instances of behavior...(and) are frequently performed with an awareness that others are reacting to the same situation in a similar manner." Although we have uncovered substantial connections between perceptions of public opinion and personal vote preferences, it is important to be wary in asserting the direction of causation. Vote preference may lead to holding distorted estimates of public opinion, although our panel analyses in previous research make a case for treating vote preference as a dependent variable (Glynn and McLeod, in press).

We should also realize that perception of public opinion variables accounted for an average of less than 8% of the variance in voting preference and November vote. It appears that perceptions of public opinion operate with relative independence from the person's own positions. These perceptions of current opinion proved to be closer to the public opinion polls of the time than to the aggregate of individual preferences in our sample. Their estimates of the November vote outcome also turned out to be relatively accurate, particularly those obtained in the October wave of interviewing. We do not adequately understand what factors incluence these perceptions of public opinion. Media reliance accounts for substantial but not overwhelming proportions of the variance in such perceptions and the respondent's own position may add more, but we need a broader examination of other influences and more detailed analyses of the processes by which perceptions of opinion are formed. The influences of smaller social systems, the person's community and social networks, may be as important as the published polls of the nation.

The results presented seem to justify the Noelle-Neumann distinction between the Hardcore minority and the majority of citizens. We found the Hardcore substantially different from our other respondents in their higher level of campaign

discussion, in their reports of lesser influence of this discussion, and in their stronger focus on candidates' issue stands and personal qualities and weaker dependence of their changes of winning in making vote choices. Interactions of Hardcoreness with other variables were frequent enough to argue for the Hardcore distinction. On the other hand, we are less than satisfied with our present conceptualization and measurement of the Hardcore variable. Alternative definitions and ways of assessment are needed. The present formulation at least provides initial insight into the possibilities of different types of people trying to cope with varying social perceptions by utilizing the communication channels available to them. When they are confident of their own perceptions or are immune toward their perceptions of what others are thinking, they may cope by discussing their opinions frequently, as in the "spiral of confidence." Or, if they lack confidence in their own opinions, they may retreat into their respective shells, as in the "spiral of silence."

Other possibilities exist. Extremely confident individuals may become apathetic about the conditions of the world, or about the opinions of those surrounding them. These individuals may talk less simply because they have nothing they want or care to discuss. They see things their own way, regardless of the opinions of others. In addition, individuals extremely unsure of their own opinions may become fearful they are losing touch with the rest of their world, and frantically scan their environment for support for their own opinions, or for justification for abandoning their beliefs.

This study of the process of public opinion provides an initial look into a process we still know so little about. While public opinion is so much more than a simple aggregation of others' opinions, it is difficult to find adequate definitions and procedures which will enable us to break through the recurring gloomy assessments that the role of mass media "...was not evident to a classical writer on public opinion twenty-five years ago (Walter Lippman) and it may be even less so today." (Berelson, 1960). Only by carefully examining public opinion as

something more concrete than a being which "dwells in or above the group" (Allport, 1937), will we be able to determine the more exciting relations the process may hold for us.

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Table 1. Vote Preferences, Perceptions of Current Opinion, Perceptions of November Outcome and Gallup Poll Data in September and October and Panel Vote and National Vote in November

	September				October			November	
Candidate	Own Pref.	Perceiv. Opinion	Perceiv. Outcome	Poll Data	Own Pref.	Perceiv. Outcome	Poll Data	Own Vote	Actual Vote
Carter	41%	42%	46%	41%	46%	45%	46%	45%	42%
Reagan	32	40	43	43	36	45	45	41	51
Anderson	27	18	11	16	16	10	9	14	7
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

N = 90 NOTE: Undecided and other candidates are excluded from the table. Own Preference is the aggregate of individual opinions of the panel. Perceived Opinion is the mean of respondents' judgments of what proportion each candidate had at the time of interview (September only). Perceived Outcome is the mean proportion the respondents thought each candidate would receive in November (asked in September and October). Poll data are the aggregated individual opinions of national samples reported in the Gallup polls closest in time to the September and October interviews. Own vote is the aggregate of panel respondents' votes as reported after the election. Actual vote is the national vote in November for the three candidates.

Table 2. Estimates of Candidates' Vote Percentages (Perceived Outcome) and Support Change Among Hardcore, Leaner and Nonhardcore Panel Respondents

Perceived Outcome Estimated % Mean	Hardcore		Leaner		Nonhardcore	
	Sept.	Oct.	Sept.	Oct.	Sept.	Oct.
Carter	46%	46%	42%	42%	43%	47%
Reagan	42	45	42	46	38	43
Anderson	12	9	16	12	19	10
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Support: Carter						
Gaining	63%	46%	30%	40%	54%	57%
Staying the Same	14	27	47	23	29	20
Losing	23	27	23	37	17	23
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Support: Reagan						
Gaining	14%	36%	29%	37%	11%	52%
Staying the Same	48	50	55	50	29	36
Losing	38	14	16	13	60	12
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Support: Anderson						
Gaining	46%	9%	45%	20%	41%	9%
Staying the Same	40	18	45	13	43	13
Losing	14	73	10	67	16	78
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N=	(22)	(22)	(32)	(32)	(36)	(36)

Table 3. Estimate of Candidates' November Vote Percentages (Perceived Outcome) Regressed on Political Interest, Newspaper, Television and Interpersonal Reliance, Hardcore and Hardcore Interaction with Media Variables

	Carter Percent			Reagan Percent			Anderson Percent		
	Simple r	Beta	Inc. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Inc. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Inc. R^2
September									
Pol. Interest	-.22*	-.22*	.050	.13	.12*	.016	.09	.05	.008
TV reliance	.14	.09	.010	-.10	-.12	.007	-.25*	-.22*	.057
Newsp. reliance	-.03	.00	.000	-.09	-.12	.009	.14	.03	.004
Interp. reliance	-.05	-.08	.006	.14	.12	.024	.17	.18	.031
Hardcore	.07	.02	.000	-.06	-.03	.001	-.20	-.18	.030
H x TV rel	-.11	.19	.004	.17	.69*	.047	.31*	.06	.000
H x Newsp rel	-.11	-.65*	.046	.17	.65*	.118	.04	-.12	.001
H x Interp rel	-.01	.06	.001	-.06	-.45	.003	.09	.47	.010
Total Communication			(.067)			(.208)*			(.133)
Total w/ Pol Int.			(.117)			(.225)*			(.141)
October									
Pol. Interest	-.02	-.08	.000	-.02	.03	.000	-.12	-.15	.015
TV reliance	-.03	-.06	.001	.09	.16	.009	-.16	-.17	.035
Newsp. reliance	.05	-.06	.000	.01	.11	.001	.09	.05	.000
Interp. reliance	-.14	-.15	.020	-.09	-.07	.008	-.11	-.11	.015
Hardcore	-.16	-.18	.029	.16	.19	.033	.11	.13	.015
H x TV rel	.16	.40	.015	-.19	-.17	.003	.02	.00	.000
H x Newsp rel	.18	.56*	.116	-.10	.23	.004	-.18	.01	.000
H x Interp rel	.19	-.38	.005	-.09	.06	.000	-.05	-.00	.000
Total Communication			(.157)*			(.025)			(.050)
Total w/ Pol Int. & Hardcore			(.186)*			(.058)			(.080)

N= 87 * sig at .05 level

Table 4. Discussion of the election in September and in October for the Hardcore, Leaner and Nonhardcore groups

Political Discussion	Hardcore	Leaner	Nonhardcore
September (Gamma=-.03)			
A lot	36.4%	18.8%	36.1%
A little	59.1	68.7	55.6
None	4.5	12.5	8.3
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
October (Gamma=+.27) p<.05			
A lot	63.7%	34.4%	40.0%
A little	31.8	56.2	57.1
None	4.5	9.4	2.9
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N=	(22)	(32)	(36)

Table 5. Regression of Campaign Communication Behavior in September and October Regressed on Political Interest, Support Discrepancy, Hardcoreness and Interaction of Hardcoreness with Support Discrepancy

	September			October		
	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2
Campaign Attention: Television						
Political Interest	.31*	.29*	.099	.36*	.37*	.130
Support Discrepancy	-.15	-.15	.024	.29*	.31*	.095
Hardcore	-.13	-.11	.011	-.07	-.05	.002
H & Support Discr.	-.08	.05	.002	-.23	-.06	.000
Total Support Discrepancy			(.026)			(.095)*
Total All four variables			(.136)			(.227)*
Campaign Attention: Newspapers						
Political Interest	.36*	.34*	.124	.32*	.33*	.105
Support Discrepancy	.04	.04	.001	.15	.15	.023
Hardcore	-.15	-.07	.004	.05	.07	.004
H & Support Discr.	-.19*	.16	.014	.10	.36	.015
Total Support Discrepancy			(.015)			(.038)
Total All four variables			(.143)*			(.147)*
Campaign Discussion:						
Political Interest	.45*	.44*	.203	.31*	.32*	.095
Support Discrepancy	.06	.06	.005	.05	.04	.001
Hardcore	-.15	-.03	.001	.09	.13	.017
H & Support Discr.	.04	-.27	.040	.09	.52	.035
Total Support Discrepancy			(.045)			(.036)
Total All four variables			(.249)*			(.148)*

(N= 66)

*p<.05

Table 6. Likelihood of Entering into a Campaign Discussion at a Congruent and Noncongruent Social Gathering by Level of Support Discrepancy among Hardcore, Combined Leaner and Nonhardcore Group, and All Panel Respondents

	Support Discrepancy	Congruent Social Gathering	Noncongruent Social Gathering	diff.	n=
Hardcore	High	3.36	3.00	+.36	(28)
	Medium	3.81	3.45	+.36	(86)
	Low	3.93	3.60	+.33	(95)
		3.80	3.46	+.34	(209)
Combined Leaner and Nonhardcore	High	3.74	3.26	+.48	(19)
	Medium	3.43	3.05	+.38	(40)
	Low	3.85	3.47	+.38	(68)
		3.70	3.31	+.39	(127)
All Panel Respondents	High	3.51	3.11	+.40	(47)
	Medium	3.69	3.33	+.36	(126)
	Low	3.90	3.55	+.35	(163)
		3.76	3.40	+.36	(336)

NOTE: High Support Discrepancy are those seeing their preferred candidate as losing support. Medium Support Discrepancy are those seeing their candidate as staying the same, while those seeing a gain in support are categorized as Low Support Discrepancy.

Table 7. Perception of Whether Respondents' Feelings Had Changed as a Result of Discussion in the Hardcore, Leaner and Nonhardcore Groups

	Hardcore	Leaner	Nonhardcore
A lot	---%	3.2%	2.9%
Some	28.6	48.4	55.9
None	71.4	48.4	41.2
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N=	(22)	(32)	(36)

Gamma=-.34
p<.05

Table 8. Perceived Influence of Party, Stands on Issues, Personal Qualities of Candidates and Candidates Chances of Winning the Election on Hardcore, Leaner and Nonhardcore groups (November)

Perceived Influence of:	Hardcore	Leaner	Nonhardcore	
Political Party of Candidates				(Gamma= +.08)
A lot	27.3%	24.1%	17.6%	
A little	54.5	34.5	58.8	
Not at all	18.2	41.4	23.5	
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Candidates' Personal Qualities				(Gamma= +.19)
A lot	59.1%	44.8%	42.9%	
A little	40.9	44.8	51.4	
Not at all	-	10.2	5.7	
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Candidates' Stands on Issues				(Gamma= +.41) p<.05
A lot	90.9%	71.4%	65.7%	
A little	9.1	28.6	34.3	
Not at all	-	-	-	
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Candidates' Chances of Winning				(Gamma= -.30) p<.05
A lot	4.5%	10.3%	22.9%	
A little	36.4	34.5	37.1	
Not at all	59.1	55.2	40.0	
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
N=	(22)	(32)	(36)	

Table 9. Vote Preferences in September and October and November Vote Regressed on Party Affiliation, Estimates of Candidates' Vote Percentages, Support Change, and Hardcoreness and Interaction of Hardcoreness with Percent and Support Change

	Carter			Reagan			Anderson		
	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2	Simple r	Beta	Incr. R^2
September Vote									
Party Affiliation	-.34*	-.20	.114	.64*	.53*	.408	-.33*	-.31*	.110
Estimated %: Sept.	.37*	.27*	.057	.48*	.28*	.079	.05	-.07	.000
Support: Sept.	.15	.10	.008	.27*	.05	.004	.13	.16	.015
Hardcore	.07	.10	.009	.14	.10	.009	-.26*	-.25*	.057
H x Est. Percent	.13	.32*	.050	.11	-.01	.000	-.14	-.01	.000
H x Support	.22*	.59*	.063	.12	.08	.003	-.23*	-.09	.004
Total Climate Var. (not including Party and Hardcore)			(.178)*			(.085)*			(.019)
Total including Party			(.301)*			(.413)*			(.186)*
October Vote									
Party Affiliation	-.55*	-.44*	.306	.63*	.61*	.403	-.16	-.13*	.026
Estimated %: Oct.	.51*	.41*	.120	.30*	.13	.011	-.04	-.04	.000
Support: Oct.	.10	-.11	.011	-.01	-.14	.020	.22*	.22*	.047
Hardcore	-.12	.04	.002	.21	.06	.003	-.08	-.06	.003
H x Est. Percent	-.21	.33	.002	.13	-.30	.002	-.08	-.49	.023
H x Support	.20	-.36	.017	.17	-.14	.000	-.22*	-.27	.006
Total Climate Var. (not including Party and Hardcore)			(.160)*			(.033)			(.076)
Total including Party			(.468)*			(.439)*			(.105)
November Vote									
Party Affiliation	-.59	-.52*	.352	.68*	.65*	.471	-.11	-.13	.011
Estimated %: Oct.	.36*	.25*	.044	.31*	.14	.015	-.14	-.14	.017
Support: Oct.	.07	-.09	.006	.09	-.05	.002	.13	.13	.020
Hardcore	-.23*	-.09	.007	.18	.01	.000	.18	.21	.039
H x Est. Percent	-.28*	.95	.015	.09	-.96	.018	.20	-.19	.003
H x Support	-.24*	-.08	.006	.10	-.38	.001	.07	.11	.002
Total Climate Var. (not including Party and Hardcore)			(.071)			(.036)			(.042)
Total including Party			(.420)*			(.507)*			(.092)

(N= 78)

*p<.05